

# UPSTAIRS BULLETIN

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 An Educational Group 

With the BI-CENTENNIAL YEAR upon us and with retrospective thoughts about things American, in relation to our own contributions to dance — we can say without ostentation that we were pioneers in the field. Eugene Loring produced his “Billy the Kid” in 1943 and later in the same year, “Oklahoma”.

Somewhere in the early 30's at the Children's Civic Theatre, we did several performances of “Green Grow the Lilacs” with songs and dances interpolated which later became “Oklahoma”.

Two dances choreographed for me by Bentley Stone started me on my way to the use of Americana for dance material. In the fall of 1932, Stone arranged a solo dance for me to Guion's “Turkey in the Straw”, which became my theme song for years. Then in 1933, he arranged a duo for Sandy Davis and I to the now famous “Maple Leaf Rag”. This dance, called “The Gay Nineties”, also became a favorite and ended up in our vaudeville act — ‘Danse Classique’ (must write about that venture one day). Mr. Stone's contribution to the ballet “Frankie and Johnny” and its success was indeed more than any present day publicity would lead you to believe. Stone had previously been in Musical Comedy and his experience in tap and that style of dance made up the major part of that ballet. The style of the ballet was “Cartoon” and not as Ann Barzell erroneously referred to in her column as “Camp”.

My earliest effort in Americana was with “Ditties” in 1933 to an original score by Lora Aborn, who was to do many dances and ballets for us in the next twelve years. The year 1939 was a very productive one for us with “Casey at the Bat” (by Stone) and “Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana”, both with Aborn scores. In that same year I did two full-length ballets — “Thunder in the Hills”, using Stephan Foster music and “That Daring Young Man” with early American composers now unknown. Both ballets used 24 dancers. In between 1942 and 1944, the first performance of “Songs of Yesteryear” (later becoming “The Singing Yankees”), “No Fable This”, (using an inscription from a New England tombstone), “Set of Three” and early in '44, “Dr. Eli Duffy's Snakeroot” came into being.

“Duffy” was danced under every conceivable condition for the next 25 years and ending up on T.V. Four boys grew up in the profession dancing the part of the ‘Roustabout’.

In re-reading old programs, I thought it would be of interest to reprint some of the interesting program notes of these early dances and ballets using Americana. Because of the various wars and lack of money, my notebooks are full of untried ideas — a list too long to print in one Bulletin.

## 1932 — “Turkey in the Straw” (solo)

Choreography by Bentley Stone

“This is a classical American rural dance-tune and as a song, it smells of hay mows up over the barn dance floors, steps around like an apple-faced farmhand, has the whiff of a river breeze when the catfish are biting, and rolls along like a wagon slicked up with new axle grease on all four wheels. It is as American as Andrew Jackson — Johnny Applesseed and corn on the cob”.

— Carl Sandburg

## 1933 — “The Gay Nineties” (duo)

Choreography by Bentley Stone

## 1933 — “Ditties” (solo)

Music by Lora Aborn

“The Ditties used here are old, old tunes — ditties that have lived because people like you and I enjoy singing . . . those who made songs like these didn't care a hoot whether they were called good music”.

## 1938 — “Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana” (solo)

Music by Lora Aborn

“The quiet of this afternoon is  
strange, haunting, awful;  
Hear that buzzing in the hot grass,  
coming from live things,  
And O, a bird is flying, high, there  
in the sky,  
So gently, so carelessly and fairly.”

—Eli Siegel

1938 — "Punch Drunk"

(solo danced by Stone)

"A dance of the tragic-comic result of a life spent in the fight game."

1938 — "Frankie & Johnnie"

Co-choreographed by Bentley Stone  
and Ruth Page

Stone created and danced the role of Johnny and was responsible for a great portion of the group choreography.

1939 — "Casey at the Bat" (solo)

Choreography by Bentley Stone

"Oh! Somewhere in this favored land  
the sun is shining bright,  
The band is playing somewhere — and  
somewhere hearts are light,  
And somewhere men are laughing, and  
somewhere children shout,  
But there is no joy in Mudville —  
Mighty Casey has struck out."

— Ernst Laurence Thayer

1939 — "Thunder in the Hills" (24 dancers)

Music by Stephan Foster

"Few people nowadays have known the pleasures, the religious ecstasy, the hysteria, or the evils that the old time campmeetings brought into a rural community — on its annual gathering, usually held in the woods, in a mountain ravine, or along a river bank. Families came from miles around in campwagons, on horseback, or on foot; pitched their tents on the grounds and did not leave until the last sinner had 'Fallen'. Every type of person came, good and bad, and a few went home not quite the same. These meetings were eagerly anticipated, as much for the singing and dancing, the love making, and the evenings by the camp fires as for the Hell and Damnation preached by the preacher. The gusto with which these folks abandoned themselves into their religion or into the gaiety echoed throughout the countryside as Thunder in the Hills."

1939 — "That Daring Young Man" (24 dancers)

Civil War period music

"Everybody loves a circus. Everybody loves the clowns, the tight-rope walker, the dancing girls of shocking attire, and the be-tighted man on the flying trapeze. The little country girl of the 70's and 80's was no exception. In fact, the ballet, "That Daring Young Man" tells of one who was so bold as to run away with a trapeze artist, leaving behind her forlorn lover to weep and forever mourn."

1939 — "Set of Three" (6 dancers)

Music - Sowerby, McDonald & Guion

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"Runnin up the River Injun Style".

"The Ladies Plum Wild".

"The Same Dang Thing"

1939 — "No Fable This!" (duo)

Choreography by Bentley Stone

From an old tombstone.

"What is the matter with my poor son? A world full of women, he picks that one, unable to chum, sew, weave or cook, she powders her nose and reads a book."

1942 — "Swanee - a Pleasing Specialty" (solo)

2nd version in 1952 a duo. First version choreographed by Bentley Stone, the second by Walter Camryn.

"The music dislocated the re-set by Mr. J. Albert Snow, and presented to public hearing through the instrumentality of Mlle. Madelene Dahlman. The costume from dageurtypes of the famous soft shoe artists of the 90's, Primrose and West, and thoroughly digested by the combined efforts of Mr. Walter Camryn and Mme. Frieda Guttinger and several auxiliary thimble riggers. The elaborate enchainements and other terpsichorean antics of Mr. Walter Camryn in this offering are inspired and devised from the genius of Mr. Bentley Stone, himself a celebrated performer in 1942."

1942 — "Boston John - the Shaker" (solo)

Music by Lora Aborn

"Now see, how spry I dance  
How nimble I can labor  
When my soul is filled with love  
And Mother's hold power."

— Shaker spiritual song (1945)

1942 — "The Harmonica Player" (solo)

Music by David Guion

"Cowboy playing on his harmonica, accompanied by his dancing, swings a wicked hoof, at the close of day."

1942 — "Songs of Yesteryear" Originally had a cast of four — later six and eventually the title was changed to "The Singing Yankees"

"If one shuts one's eyes in a room, and evokes a musical memory situated in that room, one nearly always pictures the remembered musicals around the family organ. Nothing was more

touching than a singer trying to justify the many human frailties . . . actually, we of today must listen to these songs of yesteryear with a very special sense to understand and love their tragic humor."

**1944 — "Dr. Eli Duffy's Snakeroot" (duo)**

Dances —

Blaze-away  
Chills and Fever  
The vapors  
The seven year itch  
Bats in the belfry  
The snakes  
The green apple quickstep

"From the Yankee peddler grew a countryside attraction that flourished in this land — the Medicine Show. The medicine man, carrying the nostrums of some drug house, sets himself up wherever people gather, in the public square, or at fairs. Usually assisted by a small boy, he is really a circus figure, his flow of language is comparable only to the Fourth of July orators of present day political rallies, although in horrors it could reach the bloodcurdling color of the sermons of Johathan Edwards."

**1949 — "Spring - Way Back When" (solo)**

Music by Arndt

**1949 — "Reunion" (Ballet for 3 dancers)**

Musical score by Lora Aborn with  
Choreography by Bentley Stone

"Reunion concerns three individuals; the poetic one, the good steady man and the coed who must make her choice, and their reunion — a meeting 20 years later. The philosophic attitudes before and after the acceptance of reality and compromises hinted at in the movements and poses whose vocabulary is balletic and modern, smooth and tortured, and invariably complex."

— Ann Barzel

**1950 — "Valse Cecile" . . . . . McKee**

"The Original Charleston Strut" . . Williams

"During the fabulous 20's — the era of scanty attire, the immodesty of women's dress was a popular topic. When we glance back at the way we danced — well — maybe there is hope for the youth of today."

**1952 — "Foo Foo Raw" (ballet for 5) (an expression meaning a disturbance)**

Choreography by Bentley Stone

"At the turn of the century, each American family had the inalienable right to promenade and enjoy Sunday in the park. Our Ballet shows Mr. and

Mrs. Snow and family on such a summer's day, beset by all the dubious pleasures of such a day (ants, sand and rain) with special trouble in the person of the "Foo Foo Raw". Foo Foo Raw spells disturbance for Mr. Snow and young Patrick Snow."

**1953 — "Stagestruck" or "The Road to Success"**

(solo) Period Music

"Reminiscent of the early part of the century when "the road to success" was assured by simply taking home-study courses in dramatics. Fame, and fortune, were glibly promised those who did their home work diligently and well."

Dances —

Problems  
Hurry  
A Tale of Passion  
Billy McCoy, the Musical Boy  
The Evil Plotter  
Ballroom Bobby  
Delusion

**1959 — "Like a Weeping Willow" (ballet for 24 dancers) Original score by Norman Cortis**

"The time is 1910, the place anywhere in the west. The story could be of any age and is about a boy who meets the wrong girl first. There is always an aspect of tragic humor in most of youth's problems — especially when careless love is involved — and always afterward —

"If I had listened t'what my  
Ma had said,

I would a' been home sleepin'  
in my own iron bed."

**1960 — "In My Landscape" (34 dancers)**

Story line based on the seven ages of man.  
Musical score composed by Lora Aborn  
Words from Gertrude Stein's Lectures in America

Narration spoken by John Neumeier  
Conceived and Choreographed by Walter Camryn

Lights designs by Carol Hoover  
Shadow design by Robert Wolf  
Artistic co-ordinator, Bentley Stone

Note — "Slow time in its infinity reveals in the light all things hidden, and what is manifest it hides, and there is nothing but what may come to be."

— Sophocles

**1964 — "The Lonely Ones" (Ballet for 4)**

Musical score by Lora Aborn  
Co-Choreographed by Bentley Stone and Walter Camryn

Suggested from the book by that title, by  
William Steig

Note — "They are not necessarily unhappy — some of them, in fact, are obviously, or singularity, is, of course, by no means an unhappy state — they are simply not quite like the other girls and boys."

— Wolcott Gibbs

Where choreography is not mentioned, it is mine. I regret that time — money — and the various interruptions of wars and other annoyances prevented me from doing other projected ideas. Here are a few that I did not get to —

The story of the Arkansas Traveler.

The Strawberry Roan — a score was written of this dance by Lora Aborn

The Fireman's Ball with the central character Lola Montez

The Kingdom of Kansas — a Paul Bunyon legend

Dance Calinda — a story of old New Orleans by Ridgeley Torrence

An Approaching Storm — or Fellow Citizens.

This was to be a very long work using quotes from authors such as Vincent McHugh, Archibald Mac Leisch, Howard Fast and other writers of the 40's. I most regret not getting to this one. It was to have 9 characters — was to be a solo — was to reflect the troubled times of the pre-Korean war. The characters were —

Hank Ashim — 'the shell shocked apple huckster'

Joe DePue — 'the careless lover'

Efriam Thack — 'the melancholy lumberjack'

Jacob Fox — 'the candidate for sheriff'

Deacon Dubbleday — 'the deliberating deacon'

Anton Tweed — 'the athletic primo ballerino'

Ike Mullens — 'the starved out sharecropper'

Joe Brown — 'the most prolific liar'

Ishy Cohen — 'the dreamer boy'

The quote for Joe Brown —

"After my mom an pop has several kids that turned out to be seals and geese — mom up and give him a piece of her mind. 'I'm sick and tired o' your antics, she says, next time I have a child o' yours pigs'll be flying.'" The whole thing happened just like she said and a mite quicker'n she anticipated. Sky got black's a coal-skuttil, pigs by millions flopping by overhead, whistling and groinking like the day of wrath, and right in the midst of all this hurly-burly — mom gave a shreik and I was born."

— Vincent McHugh

The quote for Ishy Cohen —

"My name is Ishy Cohen . . . and even that is contempt. But there isn't contempt inside of me. Could Teddy dream the way I do about things that might happen . . . but don't? It is early in the morning, and everything is clean and beautiful and warm . . . and I am happy to be alive . . . I am happy even after Teddy hits me . . . only . . . why didn't I hit him back?"

The following is a correction of the first paragraph of our newsletter.

*"I sometimes think that the saving grace of America lies in the fact that the overwhelming majority of Americans are possessed of two great qualities --- a sense of humor and a sense of proportion."*

*—Franklin D. Roosevelt.*

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(Please accept my apology for this great error of omission.)

- the type-setter